



**Wider Opportunities for Women**

**NEWS RELEASE**

May 7, 2008

**CONTACT:**

Ramsey Alwin  
202/464-1596 x107  
ralwin@wowonline.org

**Wider Opportunities for Women Announces New State Partners in the Elder Economic Security Initiative**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW), announces the expansion of its Elder Economic Security Initiative™ program to Michigan, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Minnesota. The Initiative is a national campaign to ensure that all older Americans are able to age in place with dignity and economic security. Today marks WOW's official partnership with **Elder Law of Michigan, New Jersey Foundation on Aging, Permanent Commission on the Status of Women in Connecticut, and the Minnesota Women's Consortium.**

The Initiative was launched in July 2005 with an award by the Retirement Research Foundation, which continues to offer critical support. The purpose of the Initiative is to provide innovative tools and approaches to shape policies and programs to promote the economic well-being of senior citizens, whether or not they have the capacity to be fully self-reliant or are in need of certain public supports.

The Initiative builds economic security for older adults through a multi-pronged approach that includes organizing, advocacy and research. The Initiative seeks to enable policy makers, aging advocates and others to develop policies and programs to help seniors age with dignity while promoting their economic security.

Over the past year, WOW has been working with partners in MA, CA, PA, IL, and WI to rollout the Initiative. With the support of The Atlantic Philanthropies, WOW will organize expand the project to a total of 20 states while continuing to advance policies and programs on a national level.

A key component of the initiative is the Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index (the Index), a measure of well-being that determines the income and supports needed for older adults to live modestly depending on their health and life circumstances. The Index was developed in conjunction with WOW's national research partner, the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Together, WOW and the Institute will develop state specific Indexes for the 20 states that are part of the Initiative and produce a national database with information on all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The Initiative in MA, PA and CA has already demonstrated that elders cannot live at the poverty level or even on the average Social Security income without subsidies for housing and health care. The Index for each state also demonstrates that when a senior is in good health, housing costs exceed all other costs including health care. Seniors in PA spend between 19 to 45% of total expenses on housing depending on their housing status. Whereas seniors in CA spend up to 70% of total expenses on housing and in MA they spend from 33 to 52% of total expenses.

Already, the information provided in the MA and CA Indexes coupled with the advocacy of the statewide coalitions is having a significant impact. The Massachusetts governor has agreed to convene a statewide

commission on long-term care and innovative outreach efforts are helping seniors overcome their resistance to enrolling in public support programs. In California, the Senate Committee on Aging and Long Term Care has held a hearing on the Index and its findings. In addition, the coalitions in Massachusetts and California are now has better equipped elder activists and aging services organizations to advocate for state and national policy reforms.

“The National Elder Economic Security Standard Index offers a new vision as well as tools to rethink aging policies and programs. Rather than set goals based on an a misleading and outdated measure of deprivation- the federal poverty level for seniors - the Initiative reshapes the public discussion on what are the real costs of meeting such basic expenses as housing and health care costs” said Joan Kuriansky, Executive Director of WOW, at a recent release of the Initiative in Harrisburg, PA.

“Unlike the federal poverty threshold, the Index is calibrated to household size, geographic area and life circumstances, and broken down on a county-by-county basis. The expansion of the Elder Economic Security Initiative will have a significant impact on reshaping the national and state public discourse about aging and public benefits in general, as well as on specific policy debates and aging programs” said Kuriansky.

The Initiative is particularly critical as we face today’s economy. Seniors living on a fixed income are struggling to keep up with rising costs of goods and services. This year, seniors relying upon Social Security for the majority of their income were forced to choose among such necessities as heating oil, prescription drugs, and food as they received the lowest cost of living adjustment for Social Security yet - just 2.3%. Meanwhile, costs for products bought by retirees are rising alarmingly from last year. With the housing market in turmoil, even the asset many older Americans had come to count on -- the value of their homes -- is threatened.

This situation is only going to become more urgent as hard working individuals see a deterioration of pensions, many find themselves solely reliant upon Social Security in their retirement years . Rising gasoline and food prices, health bills, child-care and education costs are also leaving less to set aside for retirement in the form of 401(k)s and other defined contribution plans. The Initiative through the use of the Index shows that many older Americans who are in the technical sense “not poor” because they live above the federal poverty threshold yet still struggle to make ends meet.

In the years ahead, the Elder Economic Security Initiative will provide important information to policy makers, providers, advocacy organizations, and activists across the U.S. as they develop programs and policies to ensure the economic independence of America’s senior citizens.

For more information about the National Elder Economic Security Initiative or to schedule an interview, contact: Ramsey Alwin (202) 464-1596 or e-mail at [ralwin@wowonline.org](mailto:ralwin@wowonline.org).

###

*Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) leads two national networks promoting economic security within the United States: the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project (FESS) focusing on the needs of low- income working families and the Elder Economic Security Initiative, addressing what income seniors require to age in place. WOW works in 35 states, the District of Columbia, and at the federal level to promote programs and policies that accurately measure the income and assistance needs of families and the elderly. For more information, please visit [www.wowonline.org](http://www.wowonline.org)*

*The Atlantic Philanthropies are dedicated to bringing about lasting changes in the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people. Atlantic focuses on four critical social problems: Ageing, Disadvantaged Children & Youth, Population Health, and Reconciliation & Human Rights. Programmes funded by Atlantic operate in Australia, Bermuda, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, South Africa, the United States and Viet Nam. To learn more, please visit: [www.atlanticphilanthropies.org](http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org).*